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ABSTRACT

Viewpoints on the role of educational research and evaluation in the 1980's is presented. Remarks focus on four major themes: (1) state level research and evaluation has progressed from a passive, primarily reporting role to an active, occasionally advocacy role; (2) the educational questions and the question askers have become more sophisticated and will increase in sophistication; (3) primary consumers of state level research and evaluation have changed from other researchers and evaluators to include diverse publics (e.g., legislators, state budget analysts, lobbyists from special interest groups, TV and newspaper reporters, professional organizations, and other state government agencies); and (4) the state education agency has a unique role to play in producing and consuming research and evaluation. It is forecasted that as the decade of the 1980's disappears, state education agencies will have enhanced their current capabilities in research and evaluation to guide action of state policy makers, to provide better bases for decisions and to improve educational programs for children. (RL)

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN THE '80's: A STATE PERSPECTIVE

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April 9, 1980

It's of historical interest to be in Massachusetts today to discuss what state level research and evaluation should be for the decade of the '80's. It was in Massachusetts in 1837 that a State Board of Education was first established. In 1900, there were less than 200 professionals in all state departments of education; today, there are approximately 2,000 professionals in state education agencies who are engaged in research, evaluation, planning and assessment alone.

My remarks center on four major themes:

Themes

(1) State level research and evaluation has progressed from a passive, primarily reporting role to an active, occasionally advocacy role.

(2) The educational questions and the question askers have become more sophisticated and will increase in sophistication.

(3) Primary consumers of state level research and evaluation have changed from other researchers and evaluators to include diverse publics.

(4) The state education agency has a unique role to play in producing and consuming research and evaluation.

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*This paper includes the insights and assistance of Sally Pancrazio, Tom Kerins, and Connie Wise of the Illinois Board staff.

As each theme is identified, I'll give further detail and examples, stemming from my five years' experiences as the Illinois State Superintendent. As an aside, it was interesting for me to see Bill Schubert's review of institutional contributions to the AERA annual program as an indicator of research productivity.* For the period in which I was State Superintendent, the Illinois SEA ranked first. This was the first productivity review which counted SEA contributions. What Schubert's review shows is that SEAs are engaging in research and evaluation activities which are being accepted by the traditional research community.

Theme I. State level research and evaluation has progressed from a passive, primarily reporting role to an active, occasionally advocacy role.

Historically, the forerunner of any research and evaluation was the mere collection of statistics--a task apparently endemic to governmental agencies.

From the 60's through the late 70's, SEA evaluation was basically passive in nature. Questionnaires and surveys were disseminated to local educational agencies requesting data; and very little, if any, feedback was provided to those who submitted the information, nor did those individuals have much input into the content of evaluation. Data were collected to respond to specific requirements from either the federal government or state General Assembly.

Also, during this time, program evaluation was often confused with compliance monitoring. Although there is some overlap, results of compliance monitoring activities do not often coincide with judgments relevant to program worth or impact.

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* William Schubert, (University of Illinois-Circle Campus), "Institutional Contributions to the AERA Annual Program as an Indicator of Research Productivity," Educational Researcher, July-August, 1979.

Beginning with the late 70's, evaluation has taken a more active role. SEAs now participate as part of the CCSSO/CEIS subcommittee in providing input to the federal government on evaluation designs and instruments. LEAs have an opportunity to provide SEAs with their perspective as to what is important, what should be required, and how the results might be useful on the local level. The utility of evaluation results has also been redefined; the emphasis now is on using results in quantifying decision making, planning, and policy formulation.

Through increased staff expertise in SEAs as well as statistical capacity building grants from NCES, there has been the development of statewide statistical data bases. These data bases--on pupils, finance, personnel, programs, and facilities--now allow projections, simulations, comparisons, and trend analyses which quantify recommendations for action by SEAs.

In the past, for example, the Illinois SEA reported pupil enrollment statistics as part of its reporting mandate to the Governor. Now, with the increased need for information and better analyses, projections of State enrollment data are made based on a series of assumptions about State population trends and future live birth data. These projections are used in long range planning by the Illinois State Board of Education.

A second example--this time from the school finance area--. In the past, finance statistics were gathered, reported in descriptive reports, and disseminated back to the districts. Now, in response to EEO litigation, SEAs are examining the impact of their school finance formulas on equity and fiscal neutrality principles. Aided from Section 842 federal funds, the Illinois SEA has conducted numerous studies, using the finance data base, to simulate and assess the impact of alternative funding formulats on equity and the distribution of state aid to districts.

Theme 2: The educational questions and the question askers have become more sophisticated and will increase in sophistication.

Public scrutiny of the schools has intensified in Illinois as elsewhere. Clearly, education has produced better critics. The questions being asked--and the types of people asking the questions--are wordly and perceptive. A favorite question asked by the Illinois public and legislature is: "With enrollments declining, why are educational costs increasing?" The demand for evidence and the quantitative justification for action has intensified at all levels.

This growing sophistication is most visible in our homes--where all family members are bombarded by the offspring of computer technology--pong games; hand held computer games; the replacement of the slide rule and bulky adding machines with pocket-sized Texas Instruments. Home computers--ala Radio Shack and Apple Computer Systems--made their debut this last Christmas season. Computer programming and information processing is becoming integral to American life. The'80's will see a further technological explosion as the public gets use to producing and understanding data displays. They'll expect a fast turn around time on the production of data, too.

Political polls--the thermometers of public opinion--are easily understood by the public. The concept of probability sampling--which is the essence of polling--will be taken for granted as people come to expect to be surveyed on various issues. These, too, have aided in the public's developing sophistication about education questions and the demand for data.

The point is that there is a push for better information about the schools--information which addresses the effects of various programs under various levels of funding:

--which shows what will happen if various conditions are changed;

--which describes the status of educational progress of our students and quantifies their needs.

The sophistication of the question askers--honed by their own, hands-on technological experience--requires that research and evaluation results be readily translatable into policy or action considerations. These sophisticates won't accept only a numeric story of percentages, correlations, standard devisions, and T scores. Reports must be written in such a way as to be technically sound and defensible yet educationally decipherable.

Further, these new questions askers won't wait for glossy reports to be printed in order to get their answers. The timing of releasing research and evaluation results is critical to SEA credibility. One of the various ecological like disasters of the 60s and 70s hitting education is "literature pollution"--the publication of dated, ungeneralizable, and/or overly cautious findings.

It is a myth that research and evaluation results will lead directly to action. It is the use and quality of data-based alternative strategies in the discourse and debate about issues that will enhance the state level decision making process.

Theme 3. <u>The primary consumers of state level research and evaluation are no longer merely other researchers and evaluators</u>.

Consumers of research and evaluation for the '80's decade will be pluralistic and possibly adversarial--as various groups compete for their slice of the educational pie--services. Current consumers include:

(1) Legislators and their staff need information upon which to make recommendations on whether a program should continue and whether current legislation is meeting the needs of the constituents.

(2) State budget analysts need to know how much is being spent, or should be spent for educational programs. and the fiscal impact of that program on the State's financial resources.

(3) Lobbyists from special interest groups want results which support their respective causes.

(4) TV and and newspaper reporters want information which is "hot," controversial, and of significant interest to their viewers and readers.

(5) Professional organizations want data that describe the state-of-the art of and for their members.

(6) Other State government agencies, particularly human service agencies, want access to school-based information which aids in their own program planning, budgeting, policy development.

The scarce economic resources for the decade of the '80's require more collaboration than ever before--and no where is this more viable than the sharing of information.

Some examples of collaborative consumption of research and evaluation:

In Illinois, 3 teacher unions and 3 management associations collaborated with the SEA to develop a "Teacher/Board Collective Bargaining Information System." Based on statistical data collected by various agency units, a computerized system was developed by which these diverse groups would have access to timely and accurate information about salary schedules, salary policies, contractual provisions, and fiscal data. These data were determined to be relevant to the collective bargaining process as perceived by parties on both sides of the negotiation table. The actual contract provisions are identified and microfiched so that parties can review actual negotiated language and determine the extent to which that provision is present in Illinois contracts. The process of selecting which elements to be included in the system was in itself a negotiated agreement but the process represents a pluralistic perspective.

Every year, the Illinois SEA conducts a Teacher Supply and Demand Study in collaboration with the Illinois teacher education institutions and the Illinois Association of School, College, and University Staffing. These data are also made available annually to the Illinois State Teacher Certification Board and the Joint Education Committee--the constitutionally mandated board with representatives from the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois State Board of Education.

This year, the Illinois SEA collaborated with the IHBE and the Illinois State Vocational Advisory Council to augment the NCES federally funded national study, "H.S. and Beyond," a study of Illinois seniors and sophomores, in order to obtain state generalizable data about Illinois students.

For the past several years, the Illinois SEA collaborated with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) on assessing the status of immunization of school age children. The Illinois SEA collects the statistics on polio, DTP, measles--and as a result of the school and district analyses, IDPH can target immunization programs in specific areas where epidemics are most likely. IDPH is the source for our obtaining live birth data which is the basis for our school enrollment projections.

The Illinois SEA collaborated with the Illinois Assocation of Supervision and Curriculum Development to conduct a "Census of Secondary School Enrollments, Offerings, and Co-Curricular activities." Out of these data came many reports--profiles and curricular offerings by school; special reports on subject areas (i.e., foreign language, English, social studies) and after-school activities. Since the data were reported by gender, sex equity advocates found the data useful. Policy analysts concerned about the relationship of school size and community type to curricular offerings also found useful data.

The personnel data base finds users at all levels in the educational arena. The data system is individual-specific for all certificated staff in Illinois schools--it has the name, salary, sex, race, position, certificate, birth date, years experience, and teacher institution granting first and last degree. The Illiois Women Administrators examine annually the status of women administrators. Teacher education institutions obtain a listing of their "graduates each year" to be used for followup purposes and to assess the impact on the Illinois teaching force made by that institution. Inservice education can be quantified by data from such a system.

Legislators concerned about the impact that proposed finance reform will have on their respective school districts request and obtain ump-teen sets of computer printouts showing the relative distribution of the State aid.

CETA agencies concerned with youth employment request and receive drop out statistics by prime sponsor and balance of state regions.

The Boys and Girls Scouts of America--and the military--use enrollment statistics for planning and recruiting purposes. The Illinois SEA uses enrollment data immediately after collection in the fall to assess the status of school desegregation efforts.

The Illinois SEA was required to conduct a third pary evaluation of the state funded Transitional Bilingual Program. A major question being asked was whether students in the state funded Transitional Bilingual Education Program were learning English adequately and whether they were transferring into English-speaking classrooms. The state office encouraged the General Assembly to fund an external evaluation of the program during the 1978-79 school year. The evaluation was authorized as a line item in the agency budget. The direct impact of the evaluation, a favorable one, resulted in increased funding for the program.

An advisory panel composed of local educators, advocate groups, legislators and their staffs met bimonthly to learn about the progress of the student and to advise the consultants. The SEA used its position to insure that formative communication with all the interested parties would be maintained--that these decision makers would be aware and understand as much about the results of the study as possible prior to its completion.

We are including legislative staff and the media in our review of the state assessment data. By including these groups from the beginning, they become aware of policy implications very early; and they force technicians to present results and interpretations simply.

These are just some of the many examples of how basic statistics and research and evaluation results from the Illinois SEA are being requested and used by diverse groups.

Theme 4: <u>The state education agency has a unique role in research and evaluation</u>.

Staff expertise and professionalism has unquestionably increased in state education agencies. In the Illinois SEA, for example, under my administration, the number of doctorates increased while the number of personnel decreased. With the changes in SEAs from political, patronage positions to professional positions under appointed State boards and/or Superintendents, came increasingly well trained staff--staff from the business, legal, and educational arenas.

The SEA has a unique--and well qualified--role to play relative to research and evaluation. The state education agency has the statuatory authorization to develop comprehensive data bases and has the capability to provide access to these data by others external to the SEA. The SEA can be a hub for an information dissemination network within the state. Once credibility is established, the SEA is in the best position to be the link between the LEAs and universities and the LEAs and the federal government.

The Illinois State Board of Education has a data release policy and commitment to provide information services to the Illinois public and education interest groups. The SEA must demonstrate that it can collect, aggregate, analyze, and most importantly, report information back to LEAs in such a way as to aid appropriate comparisons. Too often, the image of the SEA is that of a giant data warehouse--all consumption but little production.

Ironically, at the time there is a push for better data there is also a push for a reduction in the paperwork burden. In response to this situation, the Illinois State Board of Education established an Office of Data Management (ODMA) which is responsible for facilitating the activities of a Data Coordinating Council. The DCC and ODMA resemble in nature to FEDAC/OMB on the federal level. Careful scrutiny is given to every data collection form which comes before the Council. Sponsors of data collection forms are required to justify each item queried, how the data will be used, and what the burden will be. Consideration must also be given to whether or not the same data are collected elsewhere and if so, whether retrievable. Estimates of burden VS utility are made in deciding to approve such data requests. These activities include all research and evaluation studies which require data not already in the data bases. It is clear that data and information are resources--like dollars--which must be managed appropriately.

As the decade of the '80's disappears, SEAs will have enhanced their current capabilities in research and evaluation to guide action of state policy makers, to provide better bases for decisions, and potentially, to improve educational programs for children.

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